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TO RUEHVL/AMEMBASSY VILNIUS PRIORITY 3787
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5154
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 001062

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VILNIUS PLEASE PASS TO AMBASSADOR STEWART

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/29/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADERS ADMIT DIFFERENCES OF OPINION,
BUT DEMOCRATIC COALITION "NOT DEAD"

REF: A. MINSK 1061

[1](#)B. VILNIUS 879

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Charge met separately September 29 at the Embassy with Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) leaders Vintsuk Vyachorka and Anatoliy Lebedko to discuss the state of the united opposition (ref A). Both Vyachorka and Lebedko stated that while as before there were differences of opinion, the coalition was holding together, that they and others were committed to holding it together, and that despite reports to the contrary matters would not deteriorate further. In the separate meetings, they sounded a number of similar themes:
-- the UDF leadership (Milinkevich, Lebedko, Kalyakin, Vyachorka) continues to meet on a regular basis;
-- each UDF leader understands that the collapse of the coalition would be a victory for the Lukashenko regime;
-- the UDF is working hard (if at different tempos in different regions of Belarus) to galvanize greater support for the cause of democracy through upcoming local elections on January 14, 2007;
-- the UDF is planning events to rally support for democracy on the first year anniversaries of the stolen Presidential elections (March 19) and the removal of the protestors from October Square in Minsk (March 25).

[1](#)2. (C) Vyachorka and Lebedko separately expressed interest in a second Congress of Democratic Forces, to be held at some point next year, and both said that the purpose of the Congress would be to broaden the political base of the opposition. Vyachorka and Lebedko differed on who might be added; Vyachorka talked of NGOs, whereas Lebedko is more interested in including entrepreneurs as well as supporters of former Presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin (who was not part of UDF for the March 2006 election, but whose supporters are working with Lebedko's party and others on the local elections).

Comment

[1](#)3. (C) The strong message on unity that the UDF has received repeatedly from the USG and others -- most recently from Speaker Hastert in Vilnius (ref B) -- has clearly been absorbed. That said, it will be very important for all of the UDF leaders to stress their "unity" in public fora. Vyachorka -- who referred to "internal opponents" in the UDF and the "main opponent" (Lukashenko) -- discussed an idea for a joint statement that would acknowledge the existence of differences of opinion among the UDF leadership but confirm their joint commitment to democracy for Belarus. The next days and weeks will indicate if that spirit will prevail.
Moore